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Occupying Spaces of Belonging: Indigeneity in Diasporic Guyana

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Dedication

To my family in all the places I call home. To my mother and father, thank you for sharing your stories and unbelievable strength. I also dedicate this work to the Indigenous Peoples of Guyana, towards a brighter horizon.

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This report would not have been possible without the help of many people. It is with immense gratitude that I acknowledge the support of my Advisor, Dr. Circe Sturm. Thank you for your energetic spirit, guidance, and persistence throughout this process. You have helped me realize my deepest potential as a writer and as a scholar. Thank you. I would also like to express my sincerest appreciation to Dr. Joao Vargas. Thank you for your always-insightful reflections and for encouraging me to push forward and forge a path of understanding.

Without the continuing support and presence of my family, my friends, and my partner this report would have remained but a dream. Thank you for your kind words of encouragement, late night conversations, and tough love. But most importantly, thank you for believing in me.

Abstract

Occupying Spaces of Belonging: Indigeneity in Diasporic Guyana

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2013

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This report focuses on the intersections between diaspora and indigeneity in the nation-state of Guyana. To illustrate this conflicting, yet overlapping relationship, I examine the nature of state indigenous governing policies by tracing the colonial genealogy of the current 2006 Amerindian Act. I draw on the analytics of settler-colonialism, specifically the “logic of elimination,” to analyze dominant representations of indigeneity in the legislation, which grants recognition of collective rights and ancestral lands while constructing a narrative of national unity and belonging. Ultimately, this report seeks to shed new light on an indigenous identification as a rights-bearing subject and ultimately rethinks indigenous/non-indigenous social and political relations.

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INTRODUCTION

What complications arise when displaced peoples, whether forcibly or voluntarily, lay *new* claims to place as indigenous peoples in a territory where Indigenous Peoples already exist? In this report, I reflect upon the tensions and convergences that exist between diaspora and indigeneity in Guyana, a non-island Caribbean nation located on the mainland of South America. A recent state brochure, *The New Amerindian Act* 2006, illustrates the complex relationship that exists between understandings of diaspora and indigeneity. One of the main sources of contention between the state and Indigenous Peoples continues to be the power to define and to ascribe meaning to the term “indigenous.” In response to Amerindian demands to self-define as “indigenous,” the state justifies its retainment of the term “Amerindian” in the document, displacing responsibility onto the international community:

‘Indigenous Peoples’ is a very wide term that means different things to different people. Everybody has a right under international law to define themselves as “indigenous.” In addition, the Government looked at many international definitions and found that some of them include not only Amerindians but also other sections of the Guyanese community. Some people suggest that we define “indigenous” so it only applies to Amerindians but then it means that other Guyanese would no longer be able to call themselves indigenous and this would breach the principle set by international law (The New Amerindian Act 2006, Section V).

At first glance, one may wonder where exactly lies the issue in the state’s refusal to incorporate the term, yet it would be too simplistic to interpret this conflict as merely one over semiotics and

identities. As Amerindians have begun mobilizing around international definitions of indigeneity as rights discourse¹, they see accessing this language and rhetoric as a means to strengthen their struggles for self-determination and redress from land appropriation. At stake is the ability to illuminate their material conditions of extreme marginalization and subjugation. By refusing to use the term in the policy, the state acts to close the door for recourse in the international arena. However, it also demonstrates the complex and relational entanglements that play out between diasporic Creoles (descendants of enslaved Africans and Indian indentures)² and Indigenous Peoples, as Creoles also lay claims to place via indigeneity. That is, Creoles see themselves as indigenous to the land of Guyana, and support this claim through the definition of international law.

This report will primarily focus, then, on the case of Guyana to illustrate the tensions that play out between diaspora and indigeneity in national contexts. I use the 2006 Amerindian Act legislation to demonstrate how these tensions manifest in the national imaginary, as discourse and legality emerges from within, and is shaped by the everyday practices and interactions that occur within Guyanese society. Further, struggles within the state about its own identity, speak to the anxieties and desires of representing a *particular* representation of the nation to itself—processes of belonging and longing *for* that manifest themselves in governing policies. From this perspective, I bring into conversation literature on diaspora, settler-colonialism, and post-colonialism.

¹ Including the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. See, http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS_en.pdf

² For a useful treatment of the Asian diaspora, or on the processes of belonging for East-Indians within Guyana, see Shona Jackson (2012) *Creole Indigeneity: Between Myth and Nation in the Caribbean*.

Passed in 2006 by the National Assembly of Guyana, the Amerindian Act Bill came into effect after four years through the Commencement Bill 2010, which sought to address the fact that the legislation had failed to be implemented. The policy ostensibly grants collective rights recognition, establishes a form of “good governance” within and between tribal communities and the state, and implements a process for land titling to integrate the interior indigenous population into the larger Guyanese polity³. Upon inception, the policy was embraced by the state as a “radical change in the development of the Amerindian people’s situation,” and a true sign of meaningful change and progress.⁴ Yet, a joint indigenous NGO coalition has since labeled the bill a “regressive” violation of the Guyanese constitution and international human rights laws, and proof of institutionalization of government policies “that have been rejected by the people.”⁵ The coalition contends that in light of the bill’s non-compliance, the bill may be challenged in legal channels and international human rights bodies. Thus described, the bill leads to unresolved conflict in indigenous efforts to contest state policies that ostensibly recognize collective rights, yet impose a reconfiguration of indigenous governance and constrict indigenous self-representation and identification.

More broadly, the Act imposes a statist form of recognition that works through a process of *sense-making* of the Other. That is, the state works to make recognizable indigenous practices, culture,

³ I use the terms ‘Indigenous’ and Amerindian in this article with the understanding that there is a political struggle for recognition and inclusion of the term *Indigenous* Peoples in the Amerindian Act. This is a site of contention as creoles also seek to make claims as indigenous to the land of Guyana. I use ‘Amerindian’ more specifically in the discussion of the legislation, as this is the term used throughout the document.

⁴ Guyana Chronicle Online. “National Assembly approves Amerindian Act 2006 (Commencement) Bill 2010”

⁵ The Amerindian Peoples Association (APA); The Amerindian Action Movement of Guyana (TAAMOG) and the Guyana Organisation of Indigenous Peoples (GOIP)

and being that articulate with state narratives. As Linda Tuhiwai Smith has argued, colonialism was an “an image of imperialism, a particular realization of the imperial imagination...an image of the future nation it would become. In this image lie images of the Other,” and thus, it “[was] part of a grander narrative and yet part also of a very local, very specific experience” (2012: 23). In many ways the image of the Other, instituted under colonial rule as the Amerindian figure, continues to be negotiated and managed in the national imaginary.

In order to understand the subject-position of the Amerindian figure, I analyze the dominant discourses and representations of indigeneity in the national imaginary, which draw from colonial practices and sensibilities. This legacy continues to shape existing relationships between Creoles and Indigenous Peoples, affirming Michel Foucault’s conception of “the power of dominant discourse—to create the reality it represents” (Hokowhitu 2004:262). I examine how the discourses within the legislation, articulated from the perspective of statutory law, produce material ramifications for the Guyanese civil society and body politic. This analysis is made with the critical understanding that the law is not ahistorical, objective, or apolitical but rather, as Joanne Barker has convincingly argued regarding law and native recognition in the US, is “a discourse that operates in historically contingent and meaningful ways, articulated to other discourses ideologically, strategically, and irrationally... [that] informs the constitution and character of the relations of power” (2011: 7). Specifically I ask, what does the Amerindian Act recognize in terms of Amerindian claims to an indigenous identity as indigenous political subjects? What kinds of “relations of power” are institutionalized and structured between the state and its non-indigenous

and indigenous peoples? Finally, what does the inclusion of indigenous bodies in the Guyanese polity mean for their existing conditions of extreme poverty, marginalization, and disenfranchisement?

In order to access these questions, I trace the colonial genealogy of the current state policy. In the first section, I begin with relations of power instituted under European colonization through an attention to the logics of the 1902 Aboriginal Protection Ordinance and the 1951 Amerindian Ordinance. In the second section, I focus on the re-structuring of Guyanese society with the emergence of the settler-colonial state at Independence and the shifting policies toward the Amerindian population in the 1976 Amerindian Act and its current form, the Amerindian Act 2006. In the final section, I reflect upon the present conjuncture of creole and indigenous relations and the potential for creating new forms of socialities that recognize their different, yet interrelated forms of belonging. From this perspective, I argue, we can then begin to imagine a potential future for allied struggle against imposed colonial and Euro-modern structures and forms of power relations to conjure potential liberatory spaces for black and indigenous peoples. Finally, I offer broader reflections on the need to bring diaspora and indigenous theory within a singular paradigm, rather than continue to frame these respective analytics as being antithetical, or even oppositional as this ignores the realities of our shared histories and experiences in the everyday.

I am drawn to conduct this analysis through my own experiences as a black (African-American) and indigenous (Arawak/Warao) scholar. My location imparted a knowledge that disrupts orthodox

understandings of diaspora and indigeneity that assumes the former as being an uninterrupted condition of displacement from an original homeland and the latter as perpetual, uninterrupted rootedness in place. This, for me, has been my main source of contention with both diaspora studies and native/indigenous studies as this dichotomy ignores that indigenous peoples also lay claims to diaspora, and how diasporic communities construct claims to place and territory.⁶

⁶ For an example of rethinking the black-indigenous dichotomy see Mark Anderson (2009) *Black and Indigenous: Garifuna Activism and Consumer Culture in Honduras*.

UPON CONTACT: EUROPEAN COLONIZERS AND AMERINDIAN POLICY

Though now a settler-colonial state, three centuries of European economic and political power indelibly marked Guyanese social structure and imposed a colonial logic of race that erected “a pervasive color-class stratification [which] has evolved and permeates every stratum of Guyanese society” (Premdas 1995: 14). European colonization began at the end of the 16th century, where the arrival of Dutch colonizers established the first settlements in the territory with trading posts and plantations along the coast. The primary labor force was African chattel slavery after the indigenous population successfully thwarted threats of enslavement. Instead, the Dutch used Amerindians to capture runaway slaves that sought freedom by escaping into the remote interior. This prevented the establishment of maroon communities, as has been well documented in the neighboring nations of Suriname and French Guiana (Price 1996; Thompson 2006). Their role in policing the territory demonstrated that “indigenous groups, in effect, were the first to be ethnicized and the first to have a role for their participation in the society identified on the basis of this ethnicity” (Ifill 2009: 4).

Though “labeled as childlike, or warlike, idle, filthy, savages and heathens,” Amerindians were deemed capable allies in managing enslaved Africans (Ifill 2009: 4)⁷. Despite their role in managing the slave population, these common, yet powerful representations marked Amerindians, ascribing them to the position of being in need of guidance, care and protection. Furthermore, diverse Indigenous groups were conflated and flattened under new imposed colonial racial/ethnic identification, the Amerindian. That is, European colonizers not only constructed a homogenizing

⁷ The use of Amerindians in managing slaves is not uncommon, and has been deployed throughout the Americas.

identity, they assigned a level of worth and importance to the indigenous based on their cultural difference from other groups. The framing of Amerindians primarily in terms of culture anticipates the analytical proclivity to associate blackness with race and Amerindians with ethnicity and culture. Peter Wade argues that this association has enabled a black-indigenous dichotomy or colonial-induced “structures of alterity” that established Black and Indigenous identities in different ways, preventing a relational understanding between these categories (1997).⁸ This has been embraced in the social sciences, in particular anthropology. Moreover, this colonial induced dichotomy illustrates divisive colonial strategies that assigned roles to each group to foment conflict and prevent collective struggle against imperial and colonial domination.

The distinct treatment of indigenous peoples is evident in a number of treaties mainly with coastal Arawaks and Caribs, which further cemented relations between the Dutch and indigenous peoples, with the last recorded treaty in 1769 with the Akawaio. Mary N. Menezes thoroughly documents Dutch policy toward the Amerindians as one of alliance and a show of friendship through the exchange of yearly or triennial gifts for services rendered (1992:9-10). Further, appointed post holders would lead the Amerindians in conflicts against the Spaniards, and later on slave hunting expeditions. Finally, the Dutch acknowledged non-intervention in indigenous affairs during peacetime through the Court of Policy in 1750.

⁸ In addition to Peter Wade (1997), other works that have engaged this dichotomy in Latin American include, for example, Hale, Charles (2005) “Neoliberal Multiculturalism: The Remaking of Cultural Rights and Racial Dominance in Central America.” *PoLAR: Political and Legal Anthropology Review* 28(1): 10-28, and Hooker, Juliet (2005) “Indigenous Exclusion, Black Exclusion: Race, Ethnicity and Multicultural Citizenship in Latin America.” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 37:1-26; Ng’weno, Bettina (2007) “Can Ethnicity Replace Race? Afro-Colombians, Indigeneity and the Colombian Multicultural State” *Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology* 12 (2): 414-40.

In subsequent years, the indigenous social position changed drastically when the Dutch ceded the colony to the British Empire in 1814. The British authorities ruled until the Crown granted independence in 1966 (Fergus 1999). To that end, the indigenous role and function as slave catchers during Dutch rule came to an end after the official abolishment of slavery in 1834. Slaves departed the plantations en masse to establish their own freeholding settlements as an attempt to carve out an independent space, which resulted in labor shortages. The British turned to a small contingent of Chinese and Portuguese to maintain the colonial system of plantocracy, but soon after this contingent also abandoned the plantations for retail trade. Once they abandoned the plantations, the British began to contract for the cheap services of indentured workers from India, which has since become the largest ethnic population in Guyana.

In the 1890s, British colonial policy toward Indigenous Peoples was largely one of benign neglect, as it was assumed that they were near complete extinction. As such, Indigenous Peoples effectively occupied a position outside of colonial society, as no concerted effort was made to integrate them. This un-official policy was distinct from its treatment of native peoples in other colonies as there was no formal recognition of native land rights outlined through treaty or succession of land through conquest: “in Guyana the colonial regime could not claim rights either of sovereignty or land ownership, based on conquest or cession by treaty or papal bull, yet it asserted sovereignty nonetheless” (Colchester 2005: 278). That is, indigenous lands in the interior had not been ceded

or relinquished to the British colonial administration through conquest or treaty, but were subsumed under the colony as empty lands.

The policy of “benign neglect” shifted with the advent of the 20th century, and British authorities passed the 1902 Aboriginal Indians Protection Ordinance, which established ten reservations and appointed a Protector of Indians as guardian of the indigenous population. The 1910 Aboriginal Indian Ordinance also appealed to the guiding principle of paternalism. Ifill argues that these ordinances asserted colonial power and sovereignty, while effectively denigrating indigenous groups to the status of wards of the state. Furthermore, official colonial policy did not grant Indigenous Peoples ownership of reservations but were “designated as safe zones and could therefore be recovered by colonial officials” (Ifill 2009: 6). British customary law assumed that lands not already allocated to settlers could be claimed as Crown lands, owned and administered by the colonial power, engendering state sovereignty and legitimating settler seizure of native land (Wolfe 2006).

Further, the representation of indigenous peoples as inherently needing state protection was premised on stereotypical views of indigenous bodies as being in a semi-permanent childlike and backward state that must be guided and steered “until colonial standards of civilization are satisfied, whereby state protection [then becomes] unnecessary” (Ifill 2009:5). Though I agree that colonial indigenous policy revealed embedded paternalism, it also articulated the basis from which to subsume indigenous rights of self-determination and ancestral lands under larger colonial state

interests *as codified by the force of law*. As part of the encompassing power of colonialism, “the colonial state had stealthily assimilated the Amerindians as its subjects and then claimed frontiers against other colonial states, on the basis of extending the protections of British law and order over them” (Colchester 2005: 279). Here, the delineation of indigenous space, albeit marked as “safe zones,” reveals an undergirding logic of containment that seeks to define the relationship between people, the landscape, and the social polity. More to the point, simultaneous efforts to assimilate and contain the Amerindian marks the social landscape through state attempts to control and annex space and land. I will return to this aspect of the law in greater depth later in the report.

As Ifill describes, the perception of indigenous peoples as a vanishing novelty legitimated relocation to reservations, deployed in the language of preserving pre-colonial remnants. Here, British colonial policy provided an authoritarian stronghold in the legal framework that assigns indigenous peoples to demarcated “indigenous territory.” In the process, it marks the living space of the interior as backward, as always in a delayed state. This vision of the interior fuels and informs the collective memory of the state, and re-frames marginalization of Amerindians as a voluntary, even preferred, isolation from the centrally populated coast. They are portrayed as reclusive, ancient peoples with no vested interest in participating in colonial affairs. Indigenous involvement in policing enslaved Africans can be read as reflecting the desire to avoid becoming a target of colonial control and subjugation. Along these lines, indigenous marginalization can be attributed to minimal involvement in wage labor and the plantation system, so that consequently they did not accumulate

capital as “they refused on principle to purchase what they believed to be their ancestral lands under customary law” (Ifill 2009: 20).

Markedly, colonial policy deployed the logic of race, and its corresponding authenticity narratives as the rationale for creating coastal and interior reservations to protect “pure blood” Amerindians. Being Amerindian became premised on the conflation of blood with notions of bounded racial types. As such, British colonial authorities assumed that racial “dilution” and by extension cultural loss resulted from racial mixing with non-Amerindians. Thus, racial contamination provided the rationale to dismiss and depoliticize indigenous claims to self-determination and distinct cultural attachments to land. Along the same lines, discourses of assimilation provided the legislative space to deny claims of indigenous identification of coastal Amerindians that inter-married with Africans and other colonial subjects. These colonial logics continued to manifest within and influence subsequent policies.

Commencing in the 1930s and 40s, a combination of policies of wardship, integration and assimilation were employed to govern and manage indigenous bodies, invoking colonial notions of modernity and civilization (Ifill 2010). These policies aimed “to cease mollicoddling the Amerindians as though they were Museum Pieces and to give those who so desire the full privileges and responsibilities of citizenship so that they may take their proper place as an equal partner with the other communities in the economic and cultural life of the colony” (Legislative council debate 1944, in Butt Colson 1983). To acquire the “privileges and responsibilities of citizenship” meant

Amerindians must cease being Amerindian, becoming an “equal partner” in relation to their coastal creole counterparts. I want to underscore the assumptive logic of this debate on the Amerindian problem. I ask, exactly what kind of citizenship is being bestowed? Although citizenship is ostensibly being offered, “other communities” fuel the economic and cultural production and worth of the colony as its new “cultural life bearers,” and provide the model for good citizenship. That being said, what’s noteworthy is that the notion of citizenship is always, already fraught and tenuous considering that Creole (and Indigenous) colonial subjects are embedded within and subjected to a matrix of colonial power. Consent itself, framed as the desire to participate in the colony as its citizens, is called into question, as the consent of the colonized is not needed to carry out the imperial and colonial project. As colonial subjects are caught in the web of colonial and imperial power, the debate highlights the compulsion exerted on colonial subjects to participate in their own colonization under the guise of achieving access to equal rights and full enfranchisement. This strategy of the state masks the coercive force of the colonial project.

Implicitly, the debate evokes the memory of Amerindians as having situated themselves, through their own volition, outside of the colony. Maximilian Forte posits that Amerindian flight in the face of potential conquest from an invading colonial force, along with the alleged fate of indigenous peoples for extinction, worked to exclude Indigenous Peoples in constructing a developmental model for the state (2005). Effectively, integrative policies deployed this rationale to re-subordinate Indigenous Peoples to the political will of the state as codified by European customary law and order, and as a demonstration of state power— a disciplining force and power that constantly

shapes and re-shapes itself. In other words, they became subsumed under the plenary of the colonial state as colonial subjects, regardless of whether or not they strived for the “responsibilities of citizenship.”

The state’s transforming power is evident in the subsequent Amerindian Ordinance of 1951, which extends the logics of the 1902 Ordinance (MacKay 1999). The 1951 Ordinance grants provisions to maintain state management of the indigenous population and erects what Butt Colson has called the “‘administrative annexation’ of Amerindian peoples and their territories” (Ferguson 1994). Pointedly, the legislation empowers the Minister of Amerindian Affairs to arbitrarily take, modify or suspend indigenous land titles in six different ways, including annulling a land title, if two or more members of a community have shown themselves to be disloyal or disaffected to the state, or have done any voluntary act incompatible with their loyalty to the state (Sec. 20A (4)(d)). The Act explicitly advances Crown sovereignty by providing the legal authority to interfere in indigenous affairs, even as it institutionalizes coercive measures to prevent secession from the colonial state and merges the Amerindian segment with other inhabitants through legislative mandate.

Moreover, the 1951 Ordinance grants government officials the power to take, sell or otherwise dispose of indigenous property for purposes of its care, management or protection (Sec. 12 (1)(a)); the Minister may take indigenous children into custody for purposes of their education, welfare or to apprentice them in the service of others (Sec. 40(2)(c)(d)); may relocate indigenous communities to any region of Guyana (Sec. 40(2)(a)); may prohibit cultural and religious activities that the

Minister believes may be harmful (Sec 40(2)(f)).; and finally, any non-Amerindian wishing to visit indigenous lands, even if invited by the community, must request permission from the Minister of Amerindian Affairs under penalty of fine and imprisonment (Sec. 5). Paternalism aside, the legislation privileges “state’s rights” to define the limits and parameters of indigenous social and political status in relation to other colonial subjects. Specifically, it lends legislative force to the intrusion of the state in the sphere of the everyday, facilitating the arbitrary role of the state to rip children from their respective communities, which reveals the structuring force of the “logic of elimination” that Wolfe defines as a fundamental aspect of settler colonialism. Briefly, settler colonialism seeks the erasure of the Native, whether through assimilation or outright genocide. While it seems that complete annihilation of the Native is not the structuring objective here, state efforts to dominate, control and assimilate indigenous peoples attest to the operating logic of elimination (2006). I will return to settler colonialism in greater detail in section two, with the discussion of the emergence of the Guyanese state.

Ultimately, there is an intertwined relationship between efforts to contain the Amerindian and paternalistic policies that seek to re-frame indigenous policies as an act of state kindness. Albert Memmi says of colonial paternalism:

A paternalist is one who wants to stretch racism and inequality farther – once admitted. It is, if you like, a *charitable racism* – which is not thereby less skillful nor less profitable. For the most generous paternalism revolts as soon as the colonized demands his union rights, for example. If he recognized duties, he would have to admit that the colonized have

rights. But it is clear from everything above that he has no duties and the colonized have no rights (Spencer 2007: 224).

In other words, granting recognition of indigenous collective rights and ancestral lands are projected as gifts bestowed by the state, rather than inherent notions that originate from within the community itself. The seemingly altruistic tone and generosity locates indigenous demands as optional, and not as state priority. Because of this deceptively sympathetic stance toward the indigenous “plight,” indigenous people become indebted to the generosity of the British colonial administration and later the emerging Guyanese state. I now turn to consider what Independence signified for the indigenous in relation to the larger Guyanese society and the body politic. First, I illustrate how the transition from colonialism to a version of settler colonialism emerges with Independence. Second, I argue that through what I call indigenous valuation (to deserve or be worthy of being a part of the nation as full citizens and political subjects) the Amerindian occupies a nominal celebratory status and position, while remaining the most marginal and subjugated segment of the nation. Though recognized, the Amerindian is mobilized as a redemptive figure, which I will demonstrate through a close analysis of subsequent legislative amendments to the Amerindian Act in 1976 and 2006.

THE SETTLER-COLONIAL STATE AND SUBSEQUENT AMERINDIAN POLICY

With the advent of Independence, the British authorities explicitly linked the emergence of the Guyanese nation-state with the continuity of indigenous governing policies. Almost as an afterthought, the British administration moved to grant Amerindians secure “legal ownership to the lands where they were ‘ordinarily resident or settled’” as stipulated by the Independence agreement. The Independence agreement transferred colonial sovereignty from Britain to the emerging Guyanese state:

The Government of British Guiana has decided that the Amerindian should be granted legal ownership or rights of occupancy over areas or reservation or parts thereof where any tribe or community of Amerindians is now ordinarily resident or settled and other legal rights, such as rights of passage, in respect of other lands they now by tradition or custom de facto enjoy freedoms and permissions corresponding to rights of that nature. In this context, it is intended that legal ownership shall comprise all rights normally attaching to such *ownership* (Annex C, Section L of 1965 Guyana Independence Agreement, emphasis mine).

Soon thereafter, the Amerindian Lands Commission, established in 1966, carried out a comprehensive survey of Amerindian lands and documented indigenous land claims, publishing a report in 1969 that put forth recommendations for land titling of the majority of Amerindian communities in the nation. However, the recommendations reflected substantially smaller territorial claims than those made by the Amerindians to the commission (Amerindian Lands

Commission 1969). As evident in the Independence Agreement, one notices that the language of *ownership* is tied to recognition of Amerindian land claims. Euro-western notions of ownership are thus used to displace Amerindian's distinct cultural attachments and relations to the land—recognition effectively meant a rough approximation of translating different cosmologies to fit within statist paradigms. Even the consolidation of the nine Amerindian tribes, each positioned differently in relation to the state and to coastal Creoles, under the homogenizing category “Amerindian,” and not Wapishiani, Arawak/Lokono, Makushi, etc., bespoke the violent flattening of distinct cultural practices, beliefs, and relations to the land. Not until the international controversy of the Mazaruni hydropower project in 1976, and subsequent indigenous mobilization against the proposed project, did the state act to uphold its legal obligation outlined in the independence agreement with the passing of the Amerindian Act of 1976 (Amendment). Significantly, the Act “provid[ed] Amerindians with community title and the right to administer their areas through their captains and councils” (Colchester 2005: 285).

Portrayed as an amendment to the previous 1951 Ordinance, the Amerindian Act 1976 included limited self-governance through democratically elected Village Councils; however, under the law, the state maintained the right to remove Captains and Councilors and replace them at their discretion (MacKay 1999: 3). The Minister of Amerindian Affairs retained the authority to suspend, change or revoke any rule made by the Village Council. This amendment has been lauded by the state as a progressive step toward recognition of indigenous rights that enhance indigenous “well-being” by bringing them into the mainstream. However, the stipulations of this ordinance

reinforced state control and the exertion of power over indigenous governance through imposing a statist model of governance in the hopes of integrating indigenous polities. Rather than challenging the previous colonial legacy of integration and assimilation of Amerindian peoples, the emerging Guyanese government reinscribed these colonial logics. Independence signified that the Amerindian needed to start identifying as Guyanese (Colchester 2005). Moreover, the configurations of the policy itself show how marginalized peoples were subjected through legal discourse and made national subjects.

Further, I argue that colonial anxieties over incorporating interior Amerindians were premised on imaginary notions of a bounded concept of nation, as state sovereignty was threatened by indigenous claims for self-determination, and recognition of their traditional relations to the land. This colonial anxiety informed anti-colonial attempts to construct a national imaginary. The spatial distance between the colonial, and emerging settler-colonial, administration on the coast and the remote living space of the indigenous were perceived as potentially undermining the nationalistic project to create an (imagined) cohesive and homogenize national identity. I linger here to understand this seemingly uncomplicated emergence of the settler-colonial state. The transference of colonial power to state power, of Crown sovereignty to state sovereignty, operates as an almost seamless process; just as British customary law, as it was developed in the colony, assumed that all lands not already allocated to settlers could be treated as Crown lands, so too did the Guyanese state assume state possession of indigenous land and territory. British customary law became the unquestioned inheritance of the new Guyanese state—a transition, rather than transformation of

the existing social and political landscape. I recognize that this is common in post-colonial nations, but what I hope to underscore is how the coloniality of power, to borrow from Anibal Quijano, continues to inform conditions of relations between Creoles and Indigenous Peoples following independence, foreclosing on an ability to easily redress the marginalization of Indigenous Peoples and exploitation of their lands (2000). Moreover, this transferal of power, though limited in the global sense, marks the concerted efforts of vectors of power, the empire and the state, in keeping indigenous peoples subjugated “to their respective but related regimes of power” (Barker 2011: 10).

Following nationalist decolonial struggles for independence, there was a resurgence of non-English content of Guyanese culture and behavior patterns to de-emphasize and purge the nation of the external European Other. Brackette Williams shows how ideological struggles over the production of Guyanese identity “aimed to *place* groups within a single sociocultural and political order and to legitimate their right to participate in all aspects of society and economy...[that] proposed particular and competing intersections of territorial nationalism and cultural identities” (Williams 1991:168, original emphasis). Williams introduces the idea of “givers” and “takers,” which was instituted under colonialism, as the placement of particular groups within a racial and social hierarchical that indelibly marked and continue to shape how the nation represents itself *to itself*. Those segments of society, who historically contributed to the development of the nation, whether under conditions of slavery or indentured servitude, acquired and earned the right to construct their vision of the nation as “givers” or producers of the state. This denoted a status of relative

power and privilege to coastal populations, mainly East-Indian and African communities. Those who historically lagged in their contribution (interior indigenous groups), the “takers,” were marginalized and excluded from the nation-building project. As she argues, the processes involved in an ethnicized division of labor did not incorporate indigenous bodies into the colonial project, and cemented the majority segments of the population (East-Indians and Africans) as forbearers of national development, due to their central roles in the growth of the plantocracy system and civil bureaucracy.

As a result of this process, colonial stratifications of race, class, and gender, and sexuality instituted under British rule became a model for the nation-state, echoing Western European modern thought and its practice of linear progress as implied in colonial understandings of time and space (Williams 199; Spencer 2007) ⁹. This stratification highly valued all things European and “White,” while denigrating practices and customs associated with African-ness or Blackness, a continuum of differentiation that worked in tandem with emerging achievement norms (Premdas 1995). Williams goes on to suggest that the assessment of members of other groups derived from an internalized hierarchy based on a racial and cultural stratification, or rather the construction of a national imaginary and form of nationalism. This historical collectivized memory contributes to the constitution of space and the narrative “of modernity replacing tradition, of “weaker” peoples giving way to “strong” ones, of sloth giving way to industry”(Forte 2005: 2). The Amerindian as such is

⁹ An attention to the gendered and sexualized axis of power under colonial and post-colonial periods is beyond the scope of this paper; however, I believe that sexuality plays a foundational role in the construction of nationalism, and the nation-state. See, for example. Jacqui Alexander (2006) *Pedagogies of Crossing: Mediations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred* (Perverse Modernities).

projected as an embodiment of the past, of ossified history that justifies the annexation of land to those who have better understandings of how to use it.

As one may have gleaned from my tracing of previous amendments, the current form of the Amerindian policy—the 2006 amendment— works to shore up colonial forms of power and relations and subaltern forms of belonging. That is, it essentially preserves and promulgates previous stipulations that maintain colonial and Guyanese state attitudes of protectionism, and obscures the causes of existing conditions of indigenous subjugation. Formally enacted in 2010, the policy outlines an external form of governance to promote democracy in tribal governance, and uni-laterally imposes a top-down approach to management of indigenous affairs. Notably, Section III provides a model for indigenous governance, outlining the composition, purpose, and function of Village Councils: “to provide for the planning and development of the Village” (13)(1)(c), and “manage and regulate the use and occupation of Village lands” (13)(1)(e). Further, it specifies the extent of the powers of not only the Village Council, but also the elected Toshaos (elected chairman of the Council), whose rights to make rules, or any amendments to said rules must obtain two-thirds vote from the Village *as well as* approval by the Minister (emphasis mine). Since 1992, the Minister has been appointed by the President and is not elected by the indigenous peoples. Also included in its functions, the Village Council is responsible for: “the regulation of the conduct of non-residents when within Village lands” (14)(1)(j); and “maintaining discipline, good order, and the prevention of disorderly conduct and nuisance” (14)(1)(k). As evinced in the document, anxieties of order and respectable comportment and conduct remain a common thread throughout.

More importantly, a statist form of governance displaces indigenous forms of self-governance and self-determination, re-framing indigenous self-determination as a matter of loyalty, whereby the binary language of allegiance or dissent reflects how violence undergirds regimes.

Notably, Section VI outlines granting of communal land to Amerindian villages and communities in which “a community may apply in writing to the Minister *for a grant of State lands* provided it has been in existence for at least twenty-five years; and at the time of the application and for the immediately preceding five years, it comprised at least one hundred and fifty persons” (60)(1)(a)(b), emphasis mine). That indigenous peoples, who have traditionally inhabited land prior to colonial and state rule, must now apply to the state for permission to justify their “occupation” of the land evokes explicit state sovereignty, and frames those who refuse to engage in this land titling process as squatters on the land. As such, communities must demonstrate a historical and culturally meaningful relationship to the land, distinct from other non-Amerindian groups. Even more telling is that Amerindian communities must demonstrate the unique nature of their relationship to the land, including “a physical, traditional and cultural association or spiritual attachment to the land requested,” framed as a petition for a grant of State lands (Section IV (62)(2)). Not only does the policy grants the Minister exorbitant and un-checked powers in granting land titles, but it also allows the state to determine when (and if) Amerindians are indeed Amerindian.

One wonders, how are the markers of “Amerindianness” identified and legitimated? According to the policy, the Minister may accept the following information as proof of “Amerindianness”: “oral or

written statements from the Amerindian Village or Community; authenticated or verified historical documents...sketches prepared or authorized by the Guyana Lands and Surveys Commission; reports or document from anthropologists and archaeologists” (61(a)(b)(d)(f)). At bare minimum, one must be registered as “resident” of the Village, which must consist of an exact population of one hundred and fifty persons for a period of twenty-five years. As such, Amerindian identification is linked to unique inhabitation of a particular (titled) land and demonstrates that the state actively works to maintain bounded notions of Amerindians, in both a literal and figurative sense, whereby the state assumes the right to define Amerindians and place them within spatial and temporal enclosures. Not only is their identification as indigenous limited to fixed definitions, but their very being is contained. To the extent that the state, and, by extension, the Minister, censure indigenous peoples for wanting a policy reflective of their own interests, in their own voice, and dismisses their refusal to be made legible within a state that actively unmarks its own complicity with the dominant Western episteme, indigenous peoples are forced to directly engage a juridical system that invokes skewed and narrowed definitions of what constitutes Amerindian community, livelihood, and being.

As the 2006 Act would have it, distinct cultural and metaphysical attachments to land, and concomitant cultural difference, prove the sole basis for identity claims. If Amerindians cannot demonstrate (or perform) this script, they are not recognized as warranting state recognition and thus, their political claims for rights are de-politicized. This points to the disjuncture, gaps, and silences that exist between what is demanded and what is conceded by the state in the Amerindian

Act. Further, it demonstrates that contrary to imagined ideas of the bounded nation, the state must actively police those within its borders who seek to disrupt this script. Framed as a progressive step in opening up a space for substantive dialogue between the state and its respective indigenous peoples, the language of the document establishes unequal relations of power, even as it centralizes tribal governance, subsuming tribal matters under the plenary of state jurisdiction. The aforementioned rhetoric and logic of the document, underscores the epistemological embracing and reproducing of modern discourses that not only forecloses on different, potentially transformative epistemologies, but effectively shores up the native-settler binary. This logic works to fix both Amerindians and Creoles, “even as Creoles claim belonging as indigenous inhabitants to the land through the axis of labor, despite labor’s function in marking degrees of in/humanity” (Jackson 2012: 69). One implicit assumption within the legislation is that it assumes a shared subjectivity and connection to the land on the points of use and dominion, epistemology and cosmology between the state and Amerindian peoples, based on commonsense arrived at without Amerindian consensus.

A worry about how the nation-state is seen—by those who bestowed Independence as well as those international powers to which its economic development is dependent—appears throughout the policy. In particular, the US has historically played a prominent role of intervention in the shaping of the state during the 1960s toward capitalism and away from the threat of communism. As such, national development interests continue to reflect neo-colonial and imperial projects. For example, with regards to mining initiatives, the Act provides limited recourse to villages seeking legal redress

in their struggles against encroachment by unwanted logging and mining ventures. If a village refuses its consent in respect of large-scale mining, “a miner may carry out the mining activities if the Minister with responsibility for mining and the Minister [of Amerindian Affairs] declare that the mining activities are in the public interest” (Section 5 (50)(1)(a)). State-endorsed appropriation of indigenous land for development projects, and the construction of buffer zones between titled lands and lands pending titles enables national investments in logging and mining ventures to be legitimated, as “public interests” signify national interests. Large-scale mining operators such as Guyana Goldfields, Cathedral Mining, and Golden Star Resources, et. al are prospecting within indigenous areas. Moreover, some 3,000 plus medium-scale prospecting licenses have also been issued as of 2008¹⁰. Consequently, while the Amerindian Act explicitly calls for the demarcation of territory and land in order for lands traditionally used by indigenous communities to be marked as “indigenous space,” the process for land titling continues to be conducted in an intermittent and contested manner as bodies of water and sub-surface mineral rights remain in the control of the State, as state access to use and “develop” land and territory is permissible in the case of what is argued as prevailing national interests. Further, the policy simultaneously allows the state to assert that collective rights and ancestral territories are protected and upheld by the state even as it provides caveats that enables annexation of the land for national development.

¹⁰ Minority Rights Group International, World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples - Guyana: Indigenous peoples, 2008, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/49749d16c.html> [accessed 30 April 2013]

Limiting indigenous respective power to self-determine, as set forth through the legal framework, limits recourses in challenging state projects that blatantly disregard policy initiatives. Apparent is the continued perception of indigenous as “takers” and not “givers,” and the continual drawing on colonial cartography, rhetoric, and discourse to justify the existing form of state rule. In fact, the colonial cartography of mapping indigenous territory and lands are taken as a given in the national memory and imaginary. What I suggest is that recognition of the Amerindian does so as a redemptive, unique cultural narrative to Guyanese nationalism. This is coupled with the evocation of a shamed nation acknowledging past Amerindian policy under British colonial rule as archaic and paternalistic, and one that silences continuing violence under the new Guyanese state, unhinging the indigenous experience of subjugation and marginalization from the national imaginary. As Williams asserts “the national process aimed at homogenizing heterogeneity is fashioned around assimilating elements of that heterogeneity through appropriations that devalue them or that deny the source of their contribution, [and] it establishes what Gramsci referred to as a transformist hegemony” (Williams 1991:30). This transformist hegemony operates to structure a discursive field in “the way arguments are framed, the way dissent is controlled, and the way settlements are made” (Smith 2012:22).

This recuperation is implicit and explicit in its careful systematization of state-indigenous dealings, and inter- and intra-tribal functions that act as a form of anticipatory power. Indigenous challenges to state power is anticipated in the legislation and, thus mitigated. The policy bolsters the structuring and disciplining power of the state even as it fortifies state sovereignty from real

substantive threat as meaningful engagement and conflict with indigenous cosmologies and epistemologies are disarticulated from the legislation.

Even more insidious is that state initiatives to develop the interior become portrayed as part of the process of decolonization and constructing a Guyanese state independent of British power and influence. The state is projected as “developing” rather than annexing and “settling” the land in the image of the nation. What may appear to be benevolent and empowering for indigenous peoples is in fact a further invisibilizing of native domination and an attempt to re-locate the legacies of colonialism. Accordingly, true recognition of indigenous self-determination would mean active participation of the indigenous themselves in articulating a policy that reflects the interests of their communities. At bare minimum, this would require a policy that does not demand acquiescence to a collective memory that frames them as “takers.” Indeed, the Act crowds out and mitigates the actuality that the taking, marking, and demarcation of Amerindian lands means the Guyanese state, and those who benefit from this land policy, are the “takers” and not the benevolent “givers.”

In the next section, I explore further the current relations of power between Creole and Indigenous Peoples and their distinct, yet interrelated forms of belonging and claims to place. In my concluding remarks, I offer my thoughts on the need to recognize the differences that *do* exist between, across, and within these groups, as I seek to complicate the assumption that solidarity across difference is necessarily a “given” possibility.

PRODUCERS OF A NEW NATION: SETTLER POWER AND BELONGING

The hierarchical relation of power discussed in the previous section, designated by the “givers” and “takers,” has become increasingly dominant in present social conditions in Guyana. To better understand this dynamic, I analyze the dominant discourses and representations of indigeneity in the national imaginary that continue to shape existing relationships between Creoles and Indigenous Peoples and displace indigenous modes of being. I draw on Shona Jackson’s concept of the “subaltern settler” to analyze how the foregrounding of the indigenous subject in the national imaginary works in tandem with naming the displaced descendants of African slaves and Asian indentured servants simultaneously as indigenous to the land of Guyana (2012). This illustrates the torsions that exist between diasporic and indigenous claims to place. First, I briefly engage with the literature on diaspora and indigeneity to narrow in on the present form of political discourse at work in Guyana.

I begin with the literature on diaspora, specifically James Clifford’s seminal *Diaspora*, which offers that “the claims of diaspora” are “caught up and defined against: (1) the norms of nation-states; and (2) indigenous, and especially autochthonous claims by tribal peoples”(1994:307). He situates this relationship as one of entangled relations, rather than one that is inherently oppositional. Scholars have recently begun to explore the nature of this relationship between diaspora and indigeneity (Jackson 2012; Anderson 2010; Greene 2007; Miles & Holland eds. 2006). Further, the power of the idea of nation holds the appeal of a space of inclusion through citizenship for diasporic

experiences of African and Asian groups, which Tiya Miles and Sharon Holland have aptly argued includes “the space for a powerful imaginary—a place where Indian presence is felt and often realized” (Miles and Holland 2006: 9). In a sense, “Indian country became, for these displaced Africans, both a literal and metaphorical home” (Miles and Holland 2006: 3). Yet, many Diaspora scholars have tended to emphasize displacement from “homeland,” the structuring condition of the dispersal of a group of people, whether involuntary or forced. I highlight several aspects of the general criterion of diaspora as salient to the understanding the context of Guyana:

“expatriate minority communities” (1) that sustain a “memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland”; (2) that “believe they are not—and perhaps cannot be—fully accepted by their host country”; (3) that view the ancestral home as a place of eventual return; and (4) of which the group’s consciousness are defined by an on-going relationship with their “original homeland” (Safran 1991: 83-84, as quoted in Clifford 1994: 304-305).

As such, the (im)possibility of settlement for diasporic peoples is ostensibly evident, as they are positioned within, and against their “host country,” and continue to envision a connection to an ancestral home “out there.”

The question, then becomes what would inclusion of diasporic peoples within the “host country” mean, whereby their “consciousness” is made through connections to the *new* territories to which they have been brought and to the *new* homelands they have constructed? Mark Anderson’s work, *Black and Indigenous: Garifuna Activism and Consumer Culture in Honduras* (2009), has made the crucial intervention with the case of the Garifuna in Honduras, that black experience cannot merely be

defined on the condition of displacement from an original *indigenous* homeland or from Gilroy's re-centering of the Black Atlantic (1993), as "black subjects are, of course, not simply members of a diaspora, but native citizens of particular nations, regions, places, and communities, who belong in place and make claims to place" (2009: 17). The Garifuna case evinces "how blackness and indigeneity [are] not mutually exclusive categories but...identity formations that overlap with each other" (2009: 21). As Anderson demonstrates, the nature of diaspora takes on new meanings and valences given the local context. Ultimately, he calls for an expansion of traditional understanding of diaspora to consider the entwined relationship between diaspora, nationalism, and nativism. What I find the most interesting is that this work challenges the claims that blackness is perhaps antithetical to concepts of state, nation, and citizenship. Though certainly thought-provoking, respective scholars in the fields of diaspora and indigeneity have been slow to take up Anderson's argument and its implications—both analytical and political.

When we consider the case of Guyana, these analytical and political implications move front and center. Claims to indigeneity by those who have been historically framed as diasporic take on new complexities and meanings in a national context comprised solely of displaced peoples and native indigenous peoples—one in which diasporic populations (in this case, Creoles) constitute the "host country" and enact processes that bar Indigenous peoples from full inclusion in the body politic. Neither diaspora nor indigeneity adequately grapple with this unique situation.

I turn now to settler colonialism as an analytic that helps to illuminate indigeneity and diaspora as processes situated within particular places, and operating within shifting, and uneven conditions and relations of power. Viewed from the critical intervention of Patrick Wolfe's concept of settler colonialism as a structuring force, and not an event, one begins to understand the complex dynamics of Guyana. Accordingly, invasion marked this process, which manifests through the logic of elimination in outright naked violence (genocide) or assimilationist practices and policies toward Native peoples (2006). The destruction or "dissolution of native societies" occurs in order to construct or build a new colonial base on occupied land and territory. Renaming, and the recuperation of the indigenous as a symbolic expression of difference from the "mother country" is key. Yet, invasion is not merely a historical event determined by invasion but specific social and political formations with continuity across time and space, a structuring force "inherently eliminatory, but not invariably genocidal ... deployed in the "grammar of race" (Wolfe 2006: 387). Indigenous peoples are eliminated not as a conquered people, but as a conquerable people, based partly not on race but also on access to land or territoriality in settler colonialism. There is a strong reliance on imported labor on the plantation political economy, primarily by enslaved Africans or Asian indentured. Hence, the dispossession of land and extraction of labor fortifies the settler, occupied in Wolfe's triangulation as all non-native others, who seek to replace the position of the native, and fortifies a settler/native binary. Settler colonialism(s) provides a critical analytic and theoretical paradigm that counters commonsense understandings that colonialism ceased with anti-colonial struggles and the emergence of the liberated nation-state. Rather than a distant occurrence, colonialism very much remains present. Albeit framed as distinct from franchise colonialism, settler

colonialism overlaps, intersects, and operates alongside or even replaces franchise colonialism.¹¹ Wolfe's definition opens a theoretical and analytic framework for analyzing relations of power that continue to shape and inform existing power regimes, fortified and reinforced by colonial and imperial logics (state sovereignty), which continue to have institutional power from both the perspective of the indigenous and formerly enslaved.

There are two substantial points in Wolfe's framing of the settler that must be teased apart here. First, in many ways, this framework collapses both forcibly displaced peoples and those with relative agency within the same category. If we follow Wolfe's argument, non-native, non-white peoples who arrived to a territory where Indigenous Peoples exist also fall under the "settler" position. Second, it effectively erases power differentials that exist within this category and flattens the historical relations that inform this relationship. In some respects, the white settler is equated with the position of the enslaved African and does not account for contexts without a white settler presence.

In recent years, the fact that settler power is inherited by the state and is drawn on by other non-white groups has been of significant scholarly interest. For example, in the US-settler context of Hawaii, scholars have worked to deconstruct the enmeshed relations between Kanaka Maoli indigenous peoples, Haoles (local name for white settlers), and "locals," an amalgamation of

¹¹ For the sake of space, I do not recount the debates over settler colonialism, though I am aware that there have been critiques over its ostensibly focus on colonialism to the detriment of analysis on the role of imperialism. See for example, Joanne Barker's blog, *Tequila Sovereign* at <http://tequilasovereign.blogspot.com>.

Asian/Pacific Islanders (Fujikane 2000; Matsuda 2010). While acknowledging that locals arrived under coercive conditions of indentured servitude, they have acknowledged that they may also enact the settler script in order to maintain political power and inclusion (Aikau 2010). Jodi Byrd deploys the term “arrivant colonialism” to draw attention to how even those ethnicities forcibly brought into territory where Indigenous Peoples exist formulate their identities through the displacement of the native (2011). Drawing on Byrd, Shona Jackson makes a similar argument, yet she turns our fixed gaze away from the figure of the “white settler” to show how, for lack of a better word, “people of color” enact a mode of being, and subjectivity which may work in tandem with “techniques of settler belonging” (2012: 61). Jackson is good to think with for understanding how a form of settler-colonialism is reproduced in Guyana.

EXCAVATING SETTLER FORMS OF BELONGING

I now turn to Shona Jackson’s recent work, *Creole Indigeneity*, which focuses on the specific context of Guyana to analyze the *concept* of indigeneity, and its trajectories from the colonial to the present in “its reinvention, and its deployment in the assertion of Creole belonging” (2012: 6). Through a carefully crafted argument, Jackson elucidates the concept of creole indigeneity, or creoles forms of belonging to place. Jackson quickly clarifies that her objective is not an investigation of indigenous modes of being and belonging, but rather an attention to the ways in which creoles have come to belong to the Caribbean and what constitutes this belonging, understood as both a material and metaphysical connection to the land. For Jackson, Creole narratives of belonging and forms of

citizenship and sovereignty occurred through two interconnected phenomena. First is the real and figurative displacement of Indigenous Peoples, in which their marginalization provides the basis for “the colonial map,” one which the state has remapped “as a reflection of settler-Creole social being and material right” (2012: 2). Second, this process is captured by what she coins the ontoepistemic condition—“an epistemic *and* social ontic process” generated through the yoking of material and linguistic labor which yields a creole “laboring ontology” (Jackson 2012: 105, original emphasis). Thus stated, modern constructions of labor create the epistemological conditions for black subjectivity, becoming, and being. Jackson continues that creole modes of indigeneity must:

...encapsulate the dispersal that resulted in a laboring ontology and the historical rootedness that is younger than aboriginal claims, forcing Indigenous Peoples to redefine their nativity as one of place, in spite of a history of movement within and between islands and continents, in order to maintain claims of prior right” (2012: 107).

Jackson deploys the term subaltern settler, making visible the ways this belonging is predicated on particular power dialectic of settler and native shaping Caribbean social reality and identity formation. This concept demonstrates why Wolfe’s definition “underscores both the applicability of the term to the Caribbean and its failure to work there” (2012: 60), and rethinks the concept of the “settler” in a British colonial state founded on plantocracy and dependency on African slavery, Asian indentured servitude, and the “benign neglect” of its Indigenous Peoples. Further, “subaltern settler” beautifully captures the nuances and complexities of displaced peoples who occupy a subjugated position in relation to European colonialism and imperialism, but yet unwittingly or

purposefully enact and extend the dispossession and marginalization of Indigenous Peoples in Guyana. As such, the “ultimate settlers were those they [the colonizers] sought to extract labor from, ...who eventually rearticulated this assimilationist position in their anti-colonial struggle” (2012:60).

I find the term subaltern settler productive for several reasons. First, it allows us to move beyond our uncritical and sweeping inclusion of diasporic peoples, minority populations, and subaltern peoples under the paradigm of settler without acknowledging unequal power relations. Second, it brings attention to the ways in which creole claims to place enact settler practices of belonging through a displacing power. That modern definitions of labor provides the basis for creoles to claim Guyana as their new homeland, resonates, I argue, with Williams’s assertions that creoles make themselves over as “givers,” as those who have historically toiled the land using their very bodies. Because of bodily sacrifice, they have earned their right *and* place as producers of the nation-state. The extraction and annexation of land continues to empower and fuel the national imaginary and the production of state sovereignty, expressing the undergirding logic of containment that operates within a larger structuring force of the logic of elimination Wolfe proposes is the inheritance of the former colony.

Further, Jackson’s analysis points to the uncritical assumption of colonial and modern epistemology and practices in the Guyanese state. She constructs this argument through an attention to the transformation of the social contract, which becomes the “settler contract” and “racial contract” in

Guyana. Drawing on Charles Mills *The Racial Contract*, she argues that the Lockean “social contract” changes into a “racial contract” outside Europe, whereby “both space and its inhabitants are [made] alien” and racially structured discrimination is the norm (Jackson 2012:11). Jackson sees Indigenous Peoples as falling more broadly within this “racial contract”—“a structure of feeling with real effects that justifies differential treatment of its inhabitants” (Jackson 2012: 12). Further, she uses Carole Pateman’s assertion that the social contract becomes a “settler contract,” rendering native space empty and replaceable by civil society. Though civil society is assumed to be a white raced space in Pateman’s formulation, Jackson applies this notion of the settler contract to the dominant positions that Creoles occupy and maintain in the post-colonial state. As such, Indigenous Peoples dwell in an overdetermined location outside of the plantation economy, and later civil society. Though blacks, Indians, and Indigenous Peoples were all racialized under British colonial logics, the former two remain thoroughly associated with civil society. Notably, Jackson asserts that these new creole spaces “are not ‘white’ spaces but fall more completely within Eurowestern structure of governance” (2012: 12).

I certainly agree with Jackson’s argument that Eurowestern structures of governance continue to operate in the Guyanese state, yet there is something insufficient about completely parsing the production of creole space outside of whiteness, in that there must be an attention to the salience of whiteness given its link with colonialism and imperialism. Aileen Moreton-Robinson posits, “whiteness travelled culturally and physically impacting on the formation of nationhood, class and empire” (2004: 78). That is, whiteness is not only found “in societies inhabited and dominated by

white people [and] functions only where white bodies exist...it is 'more about the discursive practices...that privilege and sustain global dominance of white imperial subjects'" (Shome 1999:107, quoted in Moreton-Robinson 2004: 78). I recognize the need to move beyond the shadow of the white settler to understand how non-white, non-indigenous processes of claiming place potentially reinscribe erasure of native indigenous claims to place; however, whiteness has historically operated as both a colonial *and* imperial project. I do not view creole space as "white spaces" per se, as this reinscribes the reductive assertion that all roads lead back to Europe, which subaltern studies has rightly critiqued; however, I believe that the construction of creole spaces gestures toward a form of modernity that exists partially within the Euro-modern.

Jackson argues that the complex social conditions of Guyana cannot be merely situated as "subaltern versus hegemonic European," nor as a "struggle among majority racial or ethnic groups" but rather an analysis of creoles as settlers in the way in which their displacing power is exercised against Indigenous Peoples (2012: 3). At stake is the way that creole modes of indigenizing, as those who have labored the land through enslavement and indentured servitude, have become dominant in the state and crowd out indigenous metaphysical and literal connections to land "...[that] seek to bind Indigenous Peoples to a laboring epistemology that they [creoles] control" (2012: 97). My discomfort with Jackson's argument lies in her assertions about the appropriation of the indigenous through a modern laboring epistemology.

If we follow her argument, black becoming and being not only draws on indigenous displacement, but also on Euro-modern notions of subjectivity to constitute its being, even as it seeks to construct a distinctly anti-colonial Caribbean modernity. I partially agree with this point, however, it seems to situate blackness squarely within Euro-structures of governance or Euro-modernity, whereas Indigenous Peoples are located outside this Euro-modern position. This displacement of Indigenous Peoples is made clear in governing policies, as I have demonstrated with the case of the Amerindian Act. Yet, I can easily foresee this argument as leading to conclusions that the only means to escape this Euro-modern hegemony is to allow radical indigenous alterity to speak, or “the re-edition of the myth of the noble savage” as the only redress.

I believe that it is more generative to think of the ways in which creole recognition of their coloniality of power can enable a truly de-colonized form of modernity that does not seek “to tame radical difference,” and does not reinscribe a dichotomy of being inside or outside of modernity (Blaser 2009: 892). This perspective, I argue, must also recognize the everyday reality of indigenous negotiations with the state, which necessarily demand political “partial connection”, but also acknowledging that there are forms of being that *do* exist as non-modern—be it Caribbean or Euro-modern (De la Cadena 2010). I recognize that even as Creoles assert dominance over Indigenous Peoples, all of these groups are caught up in a global imperial and colonial process of subjection that frames them as Other. However, before the possibility of an alternative social and political formation that does not invalidate indigenous difference can be realized, I believe further uncovering of the nature of black becoming and being must occur, in particular with the necessarily

enabling displacement of the indigenous Other. I want to push Jackson's suggestion of the creation of black ontoepistemology on the predication of indigenous subjection and modern notions of labor by arguing that this relationship is in fact a *parasitic dependency*. I elaborate on this point in the following section, in which I provide an analysis of the nature of the native/settler binary operating in Guyana.

DISRUPTING THE NATIVE/SETTLER BINARY IN THE SETTLER-STATE OF GUYANA

Frank Wilderson's provocative work, *Red, White, and Black: Cinema and the Structure of US Antagonisms*, is useful in constructing my argument regarding a parasitic dependency between Creoles and Indigenous Peoples (2010). Though a grounded analysis of leading metacommentaries in African-American and Native American Studies in the US context, Wilderson helps illuminate the nature of the relationship between historically displaced peoples and Indigenous Peoples in Guyana. Since it is beyond the scope of this paper to engage in a thorough examination of Wilderson's structures of antagonism, an ontological analysis of red-white-and black relations and "grammars," I highlight two salient points that have relevance for my argument. From my own reading, he posits that civil society is premised upon a fundamental structural prohibition against recognizing or incorporating a being that is deemed non-human (Blackness). As such, slavery is an ontological existence that cannot be encapsulated by, nor limited to, the narrative of slavery as a historical event. The defining elements of this ontological status are accumulation and fungibility: "the condition of being owned and traded" (2010:14). The expulsion of black being outside

humanity that enables white ontological being (Human/Settler), but also the paradigm and articulating narratives of civil society. White (Human/Settler) capacity is parasitic on the fixity of black incapacity, and if this fixity were to disappear or shift, “capacity itself is incoherent, uncertain at best” (2010: 45).

In relation to the black ontological position of social death, the “Savage” or native position operates in two modalities, one that articulates and disarticulates with the White (Human/Settler) position, respectively claiming sovereignty and claiming genocide. That is, when the “Savage,” or native position, and the Slave claim genocide, they “are thus positioned as antagonisms because ethical restoration of their essential losses would obliterate the cartographic and subjective integrity, respectively, of the Americas, if not the world” (2010: 150). The destruction of the existing structures of grammar would demand, “a hypothetical moment after slavery [and] would entail the emergence of new ontological relations (the end of blackness and Humanness) and a new episteme” (2010: 27). For Wilderson, claiming an ontology of genocide cannot even be rendered legible, as a semiotics of genocide is impossible and calls into question the existing order of things. In other words, both the Slave and the “Savage” are antagonistic when they claim genocide, and potentially gesture towards something outside of the existing social formation.

I pause here for a moment to really tease out what genocide means in Wilderson’s proposed framework. A genocidal object, as Wilderson argues, cannot sustain a heritage. As such, the Slave “needs freedom not from wage relation, nor sexism, homophobia, patriarchy, *nor freedom in the form*

of land restoration.... but freedom from the Human race, freedom from the world” (2010: 141, emphasis mine). The other side to Wilderson’s argument is that the “Savage” position has the potential to recover itself from the ontology of genocide by claiming sovereignty. In doing so, it articulates with the Settler imaginary of hegemony and the impossible narrative of genocide “is managed, constrained, marginalized, and disavowed in political discourse, metacommentaries on ontology, and the cinema of Native Americans” (2010: 212). Native connection to land is an axis that articulates with the Western world and civil society when it is claimed through narratives that articulate with civil society, with the disclaimer that he recognizes the relationship between sovereign loss of land and the loss of Native life or that they are related grammars of suffering: “the modality of genocide...*coexists* with the modality of sovereignty” (2010: 51, emphasis mine). First, the subordination of genocide to sovereignty makes possible an alliance between the “Savage” and the Settler, however tenuous and incomplete this may be, while simultaneously forcing out the chance for political solidarity between the “Savage” and the Slave. Second, the subordination of the modality of genocide renders a degree of intelligibility and coherence to genocide that would otherwise be inconceivable, if it were considered on its own terms. What the Settler and “Savage” share is a cartographic coherence: at every scale—the soul, the body, the group, the land, and the universe—they can both practice cartography, and although at every scale their maps are radically incompatible, their respective “mapness” is never in question” (2010: 181). This bloc between “Savage”/Settler is formed by Humanism’s hegemony over the “Savage’s alternative world,” and would form the basis of an antagonism if the bloc’s capacity were not “both barred to and vouchsafed by the Slave” (2010: 52). The very violence that constitutes the Slave prevents this bloc

from recognizing the Slave as part of the world. Notably, it is the fixity of Blackness that allows for the “flexibility” of the non-Black.

Effectively, sovereignty pulls back from the potentially liberating force and power of claiming genocide, when it articulates to external narratives of what constitutes sovereignty. Without necessarily agreeing with Wilderson’s argument wholesale, the most striking thing for me is the implication for momentary solidarity between the black and native position in the creation of an “alternative world.” I want to emphasize that Wilderson’s argument focuses on positions in relation to one another and is not a consideration of identity formation per se. Despite running the risk of being a structurally deterministic analysis of the existing order of things, as well as a hyper-masculinized notion of what constitutes true social alterity in that the present conditions demands an obliteration of sorts, Wilderson forces us to slow down and analyze our assumptive logics of what constitutes solidarity. What we gain from Wilderson is the need to question what true solidarity demands, which is a true accounting of relations of power not only in relation to hegemonic forces, but also within and amongst subaltern groups. Moreover, there is something to be said for his concept of “borrowed institutionality,” insofar as historically speaking, however contingent it may be/has been, there are those in the Slave’s position who voice a primary relationship and allegiance to the imperial and colonial power of the Master, rather than to the colonized people of the place to which they themselves have been brought (the Native). Moreover, what Wilderson helps to highlight is that enfranchisement was not merely a site of struggle for inclusion or rights for colonial subjects, but even more so, as battles for their *humanity*.

I believe it this point of “borrowed institutionality” that Jackson gets at, though not explicitly, in naming the subaltern settler—that those who were historically subjugated under colonialism now borrow from the colonial power in order to legitimate their being. But while Wilderson considers the relationship between White/Slave in which the Slave is always, already situated outside of civil society, this is not the case in Guyana, as creoles are the majority. In many ways, the creole mode of indigeneity operates as imposing civil society as a parasitic relation that is vouchsafed by invoking the power of modernizing discourses, practices, and epistemologies. I agree with Wilderson’s point that Settler “imposition of civil society on the Native body politic is both devastating and parasitic, devastating in that it cripples the ability of Native people to think their bodies and their subjective relations through rubrics of their own cultural imaginary, and parasitic in that it requires Native people to perform a pageantry of social mimicry” (Wilderson 2010: 168). However, I would argue that refusal of this parasitic dependency breaks through, as Indigenous Peoples continue “to speak truth to power,” as their struggles to live according to their own lifeworlds and rubrics of being demands it (Schepher-Hughes 1992).

This sentiment of social mimicry that Wilderson expresses is reminiscent of post-colonial literature, which has made similar arguments on the imperial, and nationalist projects that reduce modes of self-representation, in Homi Bhaba’s words, as “mimetic” (Edward Said 1978; Gayatri Spivak 1988). As Dipesh Chakrabarty contends, “maneuvers are made within the space of the mimetic...to represent the ‘difference’ and the ‘originality’ of the ‘Indian’... [and] it is in this cause

that the antihistorical devices of memory and the antihistorical ‘histories’ of the subaltern classes of the subaltern classes are appropriated” (2000: 40). The construction of colonial Euro-modernity as the forward march of history in the name of progress is a prevailing ideology that continued after independence was granted to the colony in 1966 in Guyana, and was later adapted to create a developmental model for the state. The relationship between ideology and practice in nation building is a foundational premise, where imaginary universal conceptions of modernity and the nation-state operate as a “known history, something which has already happened elsewhere, and which is to be reproduced, mechanically or otherwise, with a local content” (Chakrabarty 2000: 39). Moreover, this is what Meaghan Morris refers to as the task of reproducing “the project of positive unoriginality” (quoted in Chakrabarty 2000: 39).

This project of Western Euro-modernity framing Guyanese society as “lack” and “inadequacy,” undermines the indigenous subject that speaks in the name of history: “‘History’ is precisely the site where the struggle goes on to appropriate on behalf of the modern... these other collocations of memory” (Chakrabarty 2000: 37). In essence, the manipulation of history and representation of the indigenous subject, under colonial rule and the emergence of the state, enables them to be situated outside of the forward march of history that is evoked in the name of progress.

Paradoxically, the “known history” of Euro-modernity that is reproduced in Guyana while enabling black being also results in a blackness that double binds itself in its loyalty and complicity with the colonial and imperial project by embracing modernist notions of being and becoming through

labor. Further, blackness also confines itself through its parasitic dependency on the displacement of native bodies, being, and epistemology. To explain further, blackness binds itself from developing its being on its own terms, just as its parasitic relationship on indigenous being yokes indigenous peoples to the state, as evinced with the creation of indigenous governance that is firmly situated under the gaze of the state as in indigenous policy.

Moreover, in thinking through the tensions between the two modalities of indigeneity that Jackson gestures toward— both creole and indigenous processes of belonging and claims to place— it is also the state’s portrayal of indigeneity as an open space of meaning that destabilizes ground on which rights are demanded and contested. Paradoxically, indigeneity opens a space for providing for the concession of certain demands for Indigenous Peoples. However, this concept also enables the continuous deferral of indigenous (and creole?) being on its own terms. This parasitic form of dependency plays out in the Amerindian Act, which codifies in law a racialized, hierarchical relation of power that relegates indigenous bodies to a celebratory and nominal political status. Given the complex case of Guyana and the complicated processes of belonging that constitute the relations between Creoles and Indigenous Peoples, one wonders if indigeneity, as a rights-based claim to place and territory, allows for the necessary disruption of the dominant creole mode of indigeneity as a hegemonic force, if connections to place and land is the very paradigm they share in common? Notably, the creole modality of indigeneity that Jackson presents remains based on an *indigenous* model of constructing claims to land and territory. One wonders, is there a space for creoles to construct claims to place not contingent on laying claims to a form of “indigeneity” to allow for

their inclusion into the nation-state? What *is* disrupted, however, is orthodox understandings that frame creoles as operating within a perpetual condition of displacement from an original homeland.

Ultimately, the struggle over land and resources, then, is more than a contest over territorial possession. It is about shifting dynamics of power as “projecting perceptions and policies, laws, and institutional relations onto natural environments and human landscapes” (Colchester 2005: 271). Even those Amerindians who live in Georgetown, the coastal urban capital, or migrate to other locations on the coast are ascribed a social location, not only insofar as a social class, but as an ascribed and sanctioned place in the social order, apparent in the clear policing of knowing one’s place and being out of place. The struggle for redress for indigenous marginalization cannot simply occur through incorporation into the existing body politics, but rather demands a search for something beyond the confines, binaries, and fixedness imposed through the existing framework of modernity, and current anti-colonial practice in Guyana. The battle for full recognition of native Indigenous Peoples must occur according to their own terms, and is one that is being fought not only in the political context of the state and social and political movements, but also on the individual terrain of struggles for her consciousness, being, and body—to re-present herself to herself outside of dominant visions. This active, if tenuous resistance is reminiscent of what Gerald Vizenor defines as “survivance,” a wedding together of survival and resistance and an active presence rather than absence. This involves engaging in forms of resistance against externally imposed notions of what constitutes indigenous subjectivity, epistemology, and being (2008). It entails a rejection of that which seeks to contain, to define, and to deplete. Admittedly, this is

always incomplete, yet ultimately, indigenous “grammars of suffering” are ones that cannot be ignored, and in many ways are uncannily similar to those of black suffering. I readily agree with the assertion that threads of utter difference do exist between indigenous and black experiences, which must be acknowledged and recognized. However, there are also threads of commonality that have been buried by imposed, and later readily embraced social alterity (race and culture), one that has constructed a seemingly insurmountable wall of difference. Indeed, much is at stake in coming to terms with our own complicity in the domination of others and ourselves.

Shifting our understanding means we must realize that speaking truth to power is not about reifying binary notions of oppressed or oppressor, but about examining the ways in which we enact power in relation to others, as a displacing *power over*. By engaging in this “messy work,” I think we can begin to imagine and envision possibilities of spaces of meaningful solidarity, and even more importantly where distinct forms of being can sustain themselves on their own terms. That is, the specific project encompasses creating spaces in which black and Indigenous Peoples can exist on their own basis, *and* construct a relational basis where they converge on shared experiences and histories of subjugation and oppression, resistance to colonialism, and resilience and survival. This common ground could open the door to a contestatory politics that breaks through on the exclusion and subjugation of blacks and indigenous peoples, but more specifically in the case of Guyana, could provide for more egalitarian relations outside of parasitic dependency. The political project, then, becomes re-shaping our attachments to one other and engaging in practices and forms of belonging and attachments to the land that are not dependent on exploitative and

exhaustive economies of labor. More broadly, this conundrum exists even for those who have recently arrived to new places, and seek to make new connections to place and construct new homes. But first, this requires a brutal, and yes, painful honesty with the legacies we have inherited through colonialism and imperialism and the numerous manifestations of its re-shaping power, in all its forms, in order to envision not only a liberatory conjuncture, but also allow for the full expression of creole and indigenous humanity.

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